

The Change of Fire Protection Delivery in the Manitowoc Fire Department

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE

By: Jeffrey Rusboldt

Battalion Chief

Manitowoc Fire Department

Manitowoc, WI.

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ABSTRACT

The Manitowoc Fire Department (MFD) is under a period of intense change. The problem facing the MFD was implementing an automatic aid agreement made necessary by annexation of a geographic area with no hydrant infrastructure. The annexation took place without adding personnel or other resources to the department. The MFD has entered an Automatic Aid Agreement with Silver Creek Volunteer Fire Department (SCVFD) to correctly serve the annexed area. This is new ground for both departments.

The purpose of this research paper was to examine future trends in fire protection service delivery for the U.S., examine what factors Manitowoc should consider in making an automatic aid agreement successful, and examine how the personnel in both departments feel about working together. By exploring national trends and experiences and examining local feelings about the change information gathered may help to make the change successful.

Descriptive research methodology was used to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the future of fire service delivery for the nation?
2. What problems may be encountered which should be recognized to make automatic aid work?
3. How do MFD personnel feel about the change?
4. How do SCVFD personnel feel about the change?

Descriptive research was used by completing a literature review of appropriate background materials on mergers and consolidations of fire services. A survey was taken of the members of the MFD and the SCVFD to find information on their feelings toward the consolidation in function caused

by the automatic aid agreement. The survey was searching for what membership felt was positive versus negative and the greatest strength and weakness of the proposed automatic aid agreement. Results found in the surveys were compared to background information found in the literature review to suggest factors to consider for the future in making the automatic aid agreement between the two departments work.

Results indicated that personnel from both departments saw personnel conflicts between the departments as a major possible issue and that command and fire operations could pose problems. Increased manpower was viewed as the most positive aspect of the agreement.

The recommendations were to go from generalized policy to specific operations, and to work at creating good relations between the department personnel to make the automatic aid agreement work.

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INTRODUCTION

The Manitowoc Fire Department (MFD) is undergoing a period of intense change. One important change taking place is the impending annexation of a large geographic area to the west of the city. The proposed annexation area is in the Silver Creek Volunteer Fire Department (SCVFD) response area. The MFD will necessarily have to enter an automatic aid agreement with SCVFD as there is no city hydrant system in the area, and the MFD has no water tankers.

The MFD response times to the area may put SCVFD on scene in some cases before MFD.

Operational procedure will be a challenge for both departments.

The annexation is also considered hostile by many people in the area and perhaps to the SCVFD membership as well. On July 5, 1998, The Herald Times Reporter contained three Letters to the Editor entitled "Proposal Needs More Discussion," "Keep Country Life the Way it is," and "Growth Taking Place too Fast." The articles were written by people in the proposed annexation area, where most of the SCVFD membership lives. Rivalries between the full time career MFD and volunteer SCFD personnel could surface and present a problem as well.

The problem facing the MFD is instituting an automatic aid agreement where operational problems and possible personnel conflicts must be faced. The purpose of this research paper was to examine future trends in fire protection service delivery for the U.S., examine what factors Manitowoc should consider in making an automatic aid agreement successful, and examine how the personnel in both departments feel about working together. By doing this perhaps we can make a smooth transition to an altered service delivery.

Descriptive research methodology was used to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the future of fire service delivery for the nation?
2. What problems may be encountered which should be recognized to make automatic aid work?
3. How do MFD personnel feel about the change?
4. How do SCVFD personnel feel about the change?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Town of Manitowoc Rapids is just west of the city limits of Manitowoc. The annexation of about 1,100 acres from the of Town of Manitowoc Rapids to the City of Manitowoc has become a subject of controversy in the local Manitowoc County area. After public opposition through a referendum by Town of Manitowoc Rapids voters the size of the annexation was changed to 403 acres (Herald Times Reporter, Friday, October 16, 1998).

In the past, fire protection to the town of Manitowoc Rapids area was done by SCVFD. A major problem faced by the MFD with the proposed annexation is lack of city water hydrant supply. Without city water mains and the fact that the MFD owns no water tankers the MFD will have to enter an automatic aid agreement with SCVFD to aid fire suppression efforts. MFD will depend on SCVFD to provide water supply via tanker trucks owned by SCVFD. When the annexation takes place SCVFD will actually own a fire station within the city limits of Manitowoc.

Response times to incidents in the area also presents problems. Because of station distance from

the area it is possible that SCVFD could mobilize and arrive on scene in this area before MFD. This fact could create operational problems between the two fire departments. Both MFD and SCVFD are members of a county wide mutual aid agreement, and the departments have worked together at large fires many times in the past. These operations have been mainly at large industrial type fires. However, automatic mutual aid has never been used before, and the departments have seldom interfaced at residential type fires where firefighters from both departments could be working side by side in fire suppression efforts.

The automatic aid agreement is an important and significant change to the MFD operation. Without the automatic aid agreement the MFD could not guarantee fire protection to the annexed area. The MFD has no water supply source in the area and does not own tankers. The city government could not provide the financing to purchase extra tank trucks and pay for career personnel to operate the vehicles. The public in the annexed area would not be provided the necessary fire protection that they would be paying taxes for without the automatic aid agreement. The citizens of the area would be at great risk. The automatic aid agreement is necessary for the City of Manitowoc to catch up services to the area. In the future water mains will be put in. The MFD will also move a fire station closer to the area to create better emergency response time. However, the change is eminent and the automatic aid agreement is the best solution at the present time.

The Strategic Management of Change course through the Change Management Model applies specifically to the MFD change problem. The analysis phase will be used to determine factors which could facilitate the change, and to assess personnel attitudes as either stabilizing or destabilizing factors in making the aid agreement successful.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Future Fire Protection Delivery

While reviewing source material there were many articles that related to fire service delivery issues. The immediate future for fire service funding is bleak (Rule, 1992). Rule goes on to state that some fire departments will face the limited funding situation as a problem, while other fire departments will view it as an opportunity. Consolidation efforts in different forms will provide one possible solution that many fire chiefs and politicians will view dimly. Tradition or not, consolidation will be “the way of the future” and fire departments in the future cannot or will not be able to provide their services alone (Thompson, 1992). The 1990's have all ready been touted as the “decade of cutbacks” in traditional governmental services while other nontraditional services such as day care and health insurance clamor for funding (Campbell, 1992).

One of the largest problems faced today is shrinking resources versus growing public expectation. More and more fire departments are turning to a variety of joint ventures to provide the level of service their communities need, while conserving scarce resources (Thompson, 1994). Very few communities can afford to maintain sufficient numbers of paid personnel to staff for optimal performance during peak call loads and major emergencies that may occur only several times a year (Stern, 1997).

Growth is the major component in the illness in service delivery problems. It may be insidious—sneaking up on you over a number of years, or it may be sudden (Furey, 1994). The Manitowoc area has experienced tremendous growth during recent years. The revised demographics of a maturing, post

baby boom America are now coming home to hurt us. The problems caused by population shifts, suburban development, and an aging society are raising anew the matter of fire protection service delivery (Carter, 1996).

One article pointed to the feeling that the public in general doesn't know or care often times how service is provided until they have to use the service. The fire doesn't care. The trauma victim doesn't care. The family of the cardiac arrest patient doesn't care. What don't they care about? Whether you get a check for your service or whether you perform your duties for free (Stern, 1997). It is probable that most people understand very little of how we work until they need our service, whether paid or volunteer. At that point the "customer" becomes very interested in how we perform.

Shrinking resources versus growing public expectations— might best be resolved by putting more than our heads together. The Pantego Fire Department situated next to Arlington Texas entered an automatic aid agreement with Arlington where Pantego benefited from automatic aid from Arlington while reaping the benefit of more calls and better training of department members while assisting Arlington (Ray, 1992). Pasco County, Florida runs a successful merged countywide fire department that depends on both paid career firefighters and volunteers (Doyle, 1982). In New York state Buschnell's Basin and Egypt fire departments cooperated by building a joint station used by both fire departments (Mathews, J. and Mathews, P., 1996). Of the articles reviewed as a counterpoint, only Aurora, Colorado avoided making consolidation changes while annexing a large area with budgetary constraints (Speed, 1989).

Types of Consolidations

More and more departments are turning to a variety of joint ventures to provide the level of

service their communities need while conserving scarce resources. Consolidation options include functional consolidation, partial consolidation, operational consolidation, merger, and mutual aid (Thomas, 1994). Manitowoc will be using a form of mutual aid in automatic aid to provide fire protection to the annexation. Functional consolidation has all ready been put in place by the use of a “Joint Dispatch” center previous to this paper.

There are four types of automatic aid. Situational automatic aid occurs when two or more agencies agree on a response to a specifically identified area or facility. Guardianship automatic aid requires a response by the agency with jurisdictional responsibility. With this type of aid the first on scene unit of the cooperating agency is only in charge until the other agency arrives on scene. Universal automatic aid is the third type and dispatches enough resource regardless of jurisdiction. Either cooperating agency may maintain charge of the scene. Combination automatic aid is as it refers to a mix of the other three types (Cowardin, 1993). MFD and SCVFD would be using a mix of Situational and Guardianship automatic aid.

Factors Important to Making the Change Work

In operational changes the leadership must come from the top down. The fire chiefs have the means to make or break the process. Without their full cooperation any agreement is doomed before it starts. Egos of the Chiefs’ need be set aside (Pittard, 1993). Respect and equality; Chief officers must look on the people under them, paid and volunteer as an asset and not a threat (Sullivan, 1997).

One disadvantage inherent in combination systems is the conflict that often arises between career and volunteer members (Stern, 1997). Efforts must be made to make each side feel

complementary and not supplementary to each other or this factor will become a dividing issue in itself.

Volunteer and career firefighters must be held to the same performance standard, training standard, promotional standard, and discipline standard, or two warring camps can form (Carter, 1996). Trust is a vital factor in making an aid agreement function, and this trust must get stronger with the test of time (King, 1996).

Use of Incident Command is essential for successful automatic aid operations (Cowardin, 1993). Developing and implementing an aid program requires detailed information about the resources of the neighboring department. The Austin, Texas Fire Department has provided all contracting volunteer fire departments with appropriate general orders and operating policies of their fire department. This lets the volunteer fire departments know how Austin operates and helps the volunteer departments in developing their own policies and procedures (Sybesma, 1991). Station location, equipment information, manpower, training, and communication are all important factors in making any mutual aid system work (Coleman, 1992). The aid agreement must spell out who is to respond and be in command, what equipment and staffing should be used, when the aid will be used, where the forces be used, how the forces will be used, and why the form of aid is being used (Carter, 1995).

The MFD can sell the SCVFD on the automatic aid agreement by pointing to problems encountered by all volunteer fire departments. Volunteers often times lack sufficient numbers of firefighters available at all times, especially during the work day (Carter, 1998). Often volunteer firefighters have trouble leaving the work place. The commitment of volunteer members is also sometimes suspect. The MFD could bolster SCVFD mission by providing consistent manpower to the automatic aid area under consideration. Training is also vitally important to the integration of services.

Training and practice conducted together under realistic situations guards against emergency performance that falls below minimum standards (Granito, 1991). It is not enough to identify people and equipment who will help with the job, but proper training is necessary to make it work (Jenaway, 1993). Maximize every opportunity to get to know the firefighters who will be counted on to provide assistance when the going gets tough. A good place to get prepared is at the more simple every day incidents, by making the routine calls practice for the extreme calls (Crandell, 1995). Major incidents should always be critiqued, and these sessions can be used to initiate new policies and procedures (Haase, 1990).

Dependency on one methodology to produce lower cost fire protection—such as mutual aid agreements-- may compound fire protection problems. Jointly planned labor-management agreements for recall using modern paging equipment can increase suppression attack strength (Granito, 1993). The MFD all ready uses this system and is worthwhile to note.

PROCEDURES

Definition of Terms

Functional Consolidation. Separate fire departments are retained but some functions are shared. An example is a joint training or dispatch center (Thomas, 1994).

Partial Consolidation. Separate fire departments are retained, and a special agreement is formed to handle specific challenges. An example is shared staffing of a fire station that effectively serves more than one jurisdiction (Thomas, 1994).

Operational Consolidation. Separate fire departments that have similar staffing levels and run the same kind of calls combine into one unified department (Thomas, 1994).

Merger. A larger department absorbs a smaller department, resulting in a single department (Thomas, 1994).

Mutual Aid. Departments give reciprocal assistance for emergency management , fire, rescue and other disaster functions. Such an agreement may specify joint response to all alarms in a given geographic area or automatic response by the unit closest to the incident, regardless of jurisdiction (Thomas, 1994).

Research Methodology

Descriptive research was used by completing a literature review of appropriate background materials on mergers and consolidations of fire services. These materials were used as the basis to answer research questions one and two pertaining to the future of fire service delivery, and what factors to watch for in a delivery service change effort.

A survey was taken of the members of the MFD and the SCVFD to find information on their feelings toward the consolidation in function caused by the automatic aid agreement. These were closed samples of 48 possible members of the MFD and 40 members of the SCVFD. These two agencies were the ones sampled because their memberships were the ones being effected by the change. The survey was searching for what membership felt was positive versus negative and the greatest strength and weakness of the proposed automatic aid agreement.

Results found in the surveys were compared to background information found in the literature review to suggest factors to consider for the future in making the automatic aid agreement between the two departments work.

Assumptions and Limitations

One assumption was that information on consolidations and aid agreements from fire experts nationwide would be applicable to Manitowoc.

One limitation to the MFD survey was that only 10 of 48 members responded. The cause of this may lay in the fact that department members are discouraged by changes within the department and are not receptive to being questioned on perhaps an unpopular topic. There have been major operational changes in the last year and some disputes between labor and management over these issues have occurred.

22 of 40 SCVFD members responded to the survey. Again, the responses were somewhat disappointing, but some viewpoints can be garnered from those who did respond. The one inference perhaps to be drawn from the automatic aid agreement is that it may have created a lot of controversy that people from neither department wish to deal with.

RESULTS

Answers to Research Questions

Research Question 1. What is the future of fire service delivery for the nation?

Consolidation and merger is the future of fire service delivery to the nation. Adopting the consolidation concept will be hard for most fire departments. The transition period will be the most difficult. Opposition will come from within the fire service as well as from local politicians. The voters too have not been receptive to consolidation of the fire service (Pepler, 1982).

Thirty years ago there were 1,350 fire departments in California. Today there are 950 fire departments. If the pattern continues by the year 2025 there will be less than 200 fire department (Wagner, 1996). Chief Jeff Johnson of Tualatin Valley Fire Department in Aloha, Oregon stated,

“Cooperative service is a fact of life, touching both public and private sectors. As communities come into a time when their resources are diminishing, and they are having to do more with less, merger and consolidation will become a more common way of life.” (Wagner, 1996, p.21).

Research Question 2. What problems may be encountered which should be recognized to make automatic aid work? There are several factors which are important in a change of service delivery, in this case, the MFD and SCVFD automatic aid agreement. Leadership from the top down must support the concept. Without visible support from the fire chiefs and politicians the troops will not follow. Possible conflicts between career and volunteer members can arise. Leadership cannot allow this, and can attempt to control this friction by consistent treatment of all members in the agreement, and by getting the members of both agencies to know and understand each other. This can be accomplished by training, tours, and by the interface that takes place at routine calls between members.

Use of the Incident Command System (ICS) will be an important factor in making the automatic aid agreement work. Information found in the literature review pointed to a sharing of policy and procedures between the integrated agencies. Information on resources available in each department would need to be exchanged also.

Training was also identified as a tool to help implement a transition to a delivery service change. The training should be simulated to mirror what actual type of emergencies the agencies will interface at. The training sessions can also be used as a format to break down the barriers between career and volunteer members and create trust between the differing members.

Finally, the background material pointed to not trying to solve a fire protection problem by using

only one methodology, in this case automatic aid. Other plans should also be used, and in the case of MFD, radio pager recall of off-duty firefighters is used.

Research Question 3. How do MFD personnel feel about the change?

Of the MFD respondents to the survey eight saw personnel conflicts between the two departments as a problem. This possibility was affirmed by information found in the literature review. Command problems were viewed as the next disadvantage with six respondents citing that possibility. Common training and use of similar Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) also were expressed as problems. Three survey respondents expressed doubts in the ability of the volunteer firefighters. Finally, three respondents felt that the automatic aid agreement would hamper MFD efforts to gain more employees in the future.

The MFD respondents also stated some advantages to the aid agreement with SCVFD. Seven respondents viewed increased manpower on scene as a positive change resulting from the agreement. Four members felt that the aid agreement would provide for a quicker response to the area until MFD can relocate a station closer to the annexed area. SCVFD has a station in the area and many members live close to the area. Three answers indicated that the increase in available equipment to use was positive for both departments. The increased manpower for use at fire scenes in the annexation area was looked at as positive in creating safer working conditions (See Appendix C).

Research Question 4. How do SCVFD personnel feel about the change?

20 respondents felt that by far the loss of territory for SCVFD was the most negative factor, and further annexations or decrease in territory size for their department could lead to their extinction. The members of their department feel threatened by the annexation and automatic aid agreement.

18 of the SCVFD respondents noted possible conflicts between career versus volunteer firefighters. The possibility of this rivalry is a threat to the volunteer firefighters. Finally, the SCVFD respondents noted command conflicts, in reference to who would be in charge at fire scenes.

The SCVFD members also saw advantages in the automatic aid agreement. Improved training with MFD to standardize response was found to be the greatest advantage. Ten respondents felt increased manpower at emergency scenes would also be positive, and make operations safer. Likewise, seven respondents felt that more available equipment would be an advantage for their department. Equipment maintenance was also viewed as an advantage by the SCVFD members as Manitowoc would lend its expertise in this area. One respondent noted access to MFD technical rescue service as an advantage. Two respondents noted that the public would be better served (See Appendix B).

DISCUSSION

Study Results Versus Literature Review

The surveys showed that membership in both departments felt there would be conflicts between the career and volunteer personnel involved in the automatic aid agreement. (Granito, 1991) pointed to using training evolutions not only to provide for better performance but as a useful place for personnel to get to know each other. Personnel, whether career or volunteer must be held to the same discipline and performance standards (Carter, 1996). By treating all personnel the same further rivalry problems can be avoided.

Command conflicts and blurred operations were cited by members of both departments as major concerns. Again training before major events take place is the key.

Chief Charles Herzog of the MFD drafted an Automatic Aid Agreement which in a general way attempts to deal with implementation of the plan. The following points from the document attempt to address some of the questions:

1. On arrival at fire scene , MFD will assume command.
2. MFD will provide five monthly training session per year to integrate SCVFD operations with MFD operations.
3. MFD will provide some services for SCVFD in an effort to make up lost revenues by SCVFD due to annexation. These include; fueling Silver Creek trucks with MFD fuel, maintaining breathing apparatus for SCVFD, and aid in off-setting costs for SCVFD personnel physical testing to meet MFD standards.

To make the automatic aid agreement work broad goals must be set and are found in the automatic aid agreement. From there specific strategies and tactics must be set through the use of SOP common to both departments and training evolutions which standardize operations together. By going from broad goals to specific objectives the change can be positive (Granito, 1991).

Interpretation of Results

The amount of material written on improvising new fire protection delivery systems around the nation was astonishing. Monetary and budget problems are the leading cause of such change, and I thought the problem was somehow special to the MFD. Ron Coleman talked of the number of fire departments sharply decreasing by the year 2025 due to budgetary matters and necessary consolidations which led me to feel that in my own area by 2025 fire protection may be provided by a regional, consolidated fire service serving an expanded population into what were once rural areas.

Combination departments using some volunteer help, or paid on call forces probably will be used in the future within 15 years. This type of change will be hard for career firefighters who want the fire service to stay the same as tradition has presented.

Implications for the Organization

There are several implications for the MFD relative to this study. In the future mergers and consolidated services will continue to be an issue not only to the MFD but to fire service organizations nationwide. Our reaction to these situations will have much effect on the status of the MFD well into the future. Government cannot and has not been able to support funding measures either locally or nationally to fund the fire service as needed without considering alternate delivery forms such as automatic aid. As annexations take place the service consolidation agreement situation will come up again. Fire service delivery in the Manitowoc County area by the year 2025 may be by a county-wide regional fire department with both volunteer and paid members working as one organization.

This possible future is threatening to a traditional paid fire department. However, if the MFD greets the future as an opportunity rather than as a problem the MFD's role in the future should be important and possibly expanded. The MFD must look for ways to play key roles for fire service delivery in an expanding population area.

Working with a volunteer group has often been done in the past by MFD through a county-wide mutual aid agreement. We must take the strengths established from that agreement and use them in the automatic aid agreement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As the automatic aid agreement goes into effect each department must learn what the capabilities of the other department are in terms of equipment. SCVFD is good at water movement and training will be necessary to integrate SCVFD tanker operations into MFD's fire attack operations. This may be the one most single important operational factor.

MFD and SCVFD should also consider sharing pertinent SOP's related to mutual fire ground operations. This goes from general to specific. If SOP's are shared knowledge of how the other department operates will be greater and a safer fire ground should be created.

Training sessions should be used to coordinate future firefighting efforts and as a common ground for personnel of both departments to accept and gain trust of personnel from the other organization.

Future readers may wish to replicate the survey, changing questions to fit the given situation. It might also be helpful to distribute surveys at meetings where large numbers of department membership may be present. To some degree the survey in itself may have been threatening to personnel of both departments.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY ON AUTOMATIC AID

10/28/98

During 1998 there has been much discussion of annexation of part of the Town of Manitowoc into the City of Manitowoc. As part of a Research Paper for the National Fire Academy I have selected this possible change as the topic of the paper. If the change had taken place at this time we would be operating under an "Automatic Aid " agreement. The following questions were selected to find out about how members of each department felt about the possible change.

1. Which fire department are you a member of? (Please circle one)

Manitowoc

Silver Creek

2. What advantages do you see for your department in the automatic aid agreement with the cooperating department? (Please list in order of most to least important).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

3. What disadvantages do you see in the automatic aid agreement for your department?
(Please list in order of most to least important).

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

4. What will be the greatest strength of the automatic aid agreement?

5. What do you see as the greatest weakness of the automatic aid agreement?

MFD personnel please return to me personally or to my mail box.

SCVFS personnel please return via the self addressed/posted envelope as soon as possible.

Thanks for your time.

APPENDIX B

Survey Results of Silver Creek Volunteer Fire Department

1. Which fire department are you a member of? (Please circle one)

Silver Creek 20 respondents

2. What advantages do you see for your department in the automatic aid agreement with the cooperating department? (Please list in order of most to least important).

1. Improved training----- 12
2. Improved maintenance----- 11
3. Increased manpower----- 7
4. Availability of special rescue----- 1
5. No advantage----- 1

3. What disadvantages do you see in the automatic aid agreement for your department?
(Please list in order of most to least important).

1. Loss of territory 12
2. Conflicts between personnel 7
3. Poor radio communications 2
4. Command/in charge conflicts 4
5. Training differences 1

4. What will be the greatest strength of the automatic aid agreement?

1. Past experience working together 5
2. Saves money 4
3. Residents better served 1

5. What do you see as the greatest weakness of the automatic aid agreement?

1. Loss of response territory 7
2. Personnel conflicts 7
3. MFD getting lost 1
4. None 1

APPENDIX C

Survey Results of Manitowoc Fire Department

1. Which fire department are you a member of? (Please circle one)

Manitowoc 10 members responded

2. What advantages do you see for your department in the automatic aid agreement with the cooperating department? (Please list in order of most to least important).

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| 1. Increase in manpower. | 6 |
| 2. Quicker response to annexed area. | 6 |
| 3. More equipment available. | 3 |
| 4. Safer operations. | 2 |
| 5. SCVFD has good knowledge of area. | 1 |

3. What disadvantages do you see in the automatic aid agreement for your department?
(Please list in order of most to least important).

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Personnel conflicts. | 7 |
| 2. Command Problems. | 6 |
| 3. Training Problems. | 6 |
| 4. SOP's not formalized | 6 |
| 5. Will hurt efforts to increase manpower. | 3 |

4. What will be the greatest strength of the automatic aid agreement?

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Increased manpower. | 4 |
| 2. Ease of transition to automatic aid. | 1 |
| 3. Best service for public. | 1 |

5. What do you see as the greatest weakness of the automatic aid agreement?

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Personnel conflicts. | 4 |
| 2. Doubts in SCVFD abilities. | 4 |
| 3. Command conflicts. | 2 |
| 4. Poorer coverage to city when MFD
responding in annexed area. | 1 |